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**“Workers in the Lord”: A Study of the Roles of Women in Early
Christianity with Particular Reference to Romans 16**

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I certify that this dissertation is my own work, and that any use of other
people’s work is fully acknowledged in the references.

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Abstract

In recent years there has been much debate about women in early Christianity based on the conflicting information contained in the Pauline texts. Romans 16 is regarded as authentically Pauline and is accepted to be an original part of the Roman epistle. Therefore, this study reliably contributes to the debate as it shows that the women greeted in the chapter performed a variety of roles in the Roman church community. Analysis of Romans 16 also reveals that some of the women performed roles that were of wider importance and were of high status in the early Church more generally. Significantly, the roles performed by all of these women were important to the development of Christianity. More importantly, this study concludes that there is no suggestion that the duties of women were subordinate to those of men in cases where they performed the same roles. The contribution of these women has largely been ignored and forgotten in both scholarship and by Christianity. Proper analysis of Romans 16 and acknowledgement of these women is important in order to paint a true picture of their situation in the early Church and to show that women have not always been marginalised within Christianity.

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Abbreviations

AMP: Amplified Bible

ASV: American Standard Version

CEV: Contemporary English Version

CSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible

DRA: Douay-Rheims Bible

ESV: English Standard Version

KJV: King James Version

NET Bible: New English Translation

NIV: New International Version

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version

PHILLIPS: J.B. Phillips New Testament

RSV: Revised Standard Version

TLB: The Living Bible

WYC: Wycliffe Bible

YLT: Young's Literal Translation

Introduction

Romans 16 is the final chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is estimated to have been penned between 55-58 C.E. while Paul was in Corinth before he embarked on his journey to Jerusalem.¹ In Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to twenty-six individuals whom it is believed were important figures and whom Paul thought deserved merit for their work for the Church. Ten of the people greeted by Paul are women. Therefore, this is a highly important chapter for debate about women in early Christianity, and Christianity in general, as it provides some of the earliest primary evidence with regard to women's roles in early Christianity. If Paul had not written these greetings the participation of these women in the development of Christianity would likely never have been known.²

Romans 16 is also important as it contributes to the understanding of Paul's views of women. Based on other New Testament writings which have been attributed to him, Paul is often characterised as being actively misogynistic and restrictive of the roles of women within the Church.³ These passages include 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 which states that 'women should be silent in the churches' and that they 'should be subordinate' (14:34); both 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 2 Timothy 11:13 states that women should learn in submission and are not permitted to teach men; and the declaration of headship in Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 states that the 'husband is the head of the wife' (Eph. 5:23). However, recent scholarship suggests that these passages were not written by Paul. First and Second Timothy and Ephesians are contested works and considered to be pseudepigraphical,⁴ and the passages in 1 Corinthians are also thought to have been later interpolations by scribes in an effort to align the epistle with the policies and practices of the Church which had become the

¹ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 47-48.

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History', in *World and World*, 6 (1986)
<http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/6-4_Romans/6-4_Fiorenza.pdf> 420-433 (423)
[accessed 20 November 2018].

³ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 30.

⁴ Margaret Y. MacDonald, 'Reading Real Women Through the Unidputed Letters of Paul', 199-200.

norm by the second and third generation of Christianity.⁵ Paul has, therefore, perhaps been misunderstood in terms of his views of women. His commendation of the women in Romans 16 also supports this view.

This study will analyse what Paul says about each of the women greeted in Romans 16 in order to discover what this may disclose about their role and importance in the early Christian community. It is important to note that whilst it is highly plausible that scholars such as Ross S. Kraemer and Bernadette Brooten are correct in their assumption that other women may also have assumed these same roles in early Christianity,⁶ there is no evidence to prove this proposition. This study, therefore, aims to uncover the roles of the women in Romans 16 in order to show that women did carry out important roles in early Christianity. It will not, however, provide an overall picture of the position of women in early Christianity generally as this is an impossible task to complete solely from analysis of Romans 16, and the primary evidence with regard to women in early Christianity is lacking.

The first chapter of this study will focus on issues of the authenticity of Romans 16. Addressing these issues is important as knowing if the chapter is authentically Pauline and was an original part of the letter to the Romans is necessary in order to determine whether it can be used as evidence of the actual roles of women in early Christianity. The second and third chapters of this study will seek to bring to light the roles of each of the women referred to in Romans 16 and to try to uncover what their duty is likely to have involved. This will be achieved through in-depth analysis of Romans 16, with specific focus on the proper translations of the terms used to refer to the roles of the women, as well as the use of commentaries on the text.

Chapter 1: Issues of Authenticity and the Original Form of Romans

This chapter will analyse issues surrounding the authenticity of Romans 16. This is necessary in order to determine whether the chapter can contribute to the debate about

⁵ John B. Cobb, JR., and David J. Lull, *Romans* (Missouri: Chalice, 2005), 185-186. (See also, Ruth B. Edwards, *The Case for Women's Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1989), 67).

⁶ Ross S. Kraemer, and Bernadette Brooten, cited in, Margaret Y. MacDonald, 'Reading Real Women', 210.

the status and role of women in early Christian communities as well as in later Christianity. This chapter of the study will examine issues regarding the original form of Romans, as some manuscript evidence suggests that Romans may not have originally contained 16 chapters. It will also analyse whether or not the available textual evidence provides substantial evidence to conclude that chapter 16 was not written by Paul.

1.1. The Authenticity of Romans 16: Writing Style and Content

Romans is generally accepted as an authentic Pauline text.⁷ The main issue which has arisen with regard to its authenticity is the proposal that chapters 15 and 16 were not actually written by Paul but were the work of a Paulinist. The main proponent of this argument was F.C. Baur who stated that the final two chapters were added later by a scribe who sought to ‘soothe the Judaist, and to promote the cause of unity, and therefore temper the keen anti-Judaism of Paul with a milder and more conciliatory conclusion to his epistle’.⁸ However, this view has largely been challenged. The main refutation to Baur came from Joseph B. Lightfoot who stated that the Roman Church was likely made up of a mixture of Jewish and Gentile converts and Judaizers may have been a strong force in the Roman Church. Therefore, like Paul’s other letters, ‘the destination of the letter was in harmony with its subject’,⁹ and it is more likely that all of the chapters originally belonged to the Roman epistle as ‘its aim from beginning to end is conciliation – conciliation of claims, conciliation of doctrine, conciliation of practice’.¹⁰

Importantly, there is no evidence that Paul in the Roman epistle is polemicising against Jewish Christians, or indeed Judaism itself (see particularly chapters 9-11 in which Paul defends Jewish Christians and his own Jewish heritage).¹¹ F. C. Baur’s claim that Paul promoted anti-Jewish views is seemingly misguided. Furthermore, the final two chapters are, in all likelihood, not a forgery as their substance and style is

⁷ John Ziesler, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 19. (See also, Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 2).

⁸ F.C. Baur, cited in, Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 19.

⁹ J.B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 15.

¹⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, 15.

¹¹ Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 3-4.

similar to the rest of the letter and to other authentic Pauline epistles. For instance, Romans 15:22-30 reiterates in detail Paul's plan to visit Rome following his trip to Jerusalem and before he journeys to Spain; a desire which he previously expressed in 1:11-15. The greetings in Romans 16 are theorised to be directly connected to this purpose. The purpose of his greetings is considered to possibly have been so that those whom he knew in Rome could help him to gather support for his mission to Spain.¹²

Furthermore, the closely connected teachings of chapters 14 and 15 suggest that they originally belonged together and were written by the same author.¹³ As well as this, the 'final instructions' in Romans 16 (verses 17-20) summarise the teachings of chapter 14 (see, 14:13, 20). The vocabulary used is also similar, with a key theme of Romans 14 being concern for food and the belly as a stumbling block for the weak, and Romans 16:18 referring to the problem with those who 'do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites'. The subject matter of these chapters is directly connected, which suggests that they originally belonged together. This, along with the similarities in vocabulary, suggests that they were written by the same author.

Furthermore, the 16-chapter form of Romans is also in all likelihood the original form because it is reflective of the style and structure of letters in the period and, as Richard Longenecker said, 'exhibits the epistolary features and conventions of a typical Pauline letter'.¹⁴ As the shorter forms of Romans (a 14- or 15-chapter form) lack the epistolary closing elements of Romans 16, the indication seems to be that they are abbreviated versions of the original long form. The argument that chapters 15 and 16 of Romans were the work of a Paulinist does not hold satisfactory plausibility as in order to produce a successful forgery it would have required the forger to have the most detailed knowledge and consummate skill.¹⁵

¹² John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 3. (See also, Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2., and Charles Gore, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: John Murray, 1900), 172-173.)

¹³ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 28.

¹⁴ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 28.

¹⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, 290.

1.2. The Original Form of Romans: Manuscript Evidence

Ancient manuscripts of Romans provide complex evidence with regard to its initial composition. Three main versions of Romans can be found in manuscripts: (1) the long version of Romans (1-16) which is found in texts such as Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Codex Claromontanus; (2) the version of Romans which contains only chapters 1-14 and places the doxology of Romans 16:25-27 after chapter 14 (such as vg and Codex Amiatinus), which suggests that chapters 15 and 16 were not contained in the original form; the origin of this version can be traced back to Marcion and the issues with this version will be explained later in this chapter; and (3) the version of Romans found in Papyrus 46 (dated around 200 C.E.) which initially contains Romans 1-15, followed by the doxology, and then Romans 16:1-23, thus suggesting that the letter may have at one time ended at 15:33.¹⁶

Although some manuscripts contain a 14-chapter form of Romans, it is highly probable that in its original form, as it was written by Paul, Romans never existed as a 14-chapter letter. One of the reasons for this is that, as discussed previously, it is unlikely that chapter 14 was written without chapter 15 due to the similar nature of the content.¹⁷ Further evidence to dispute the 14-chapter form is Origen's claim that Marcion removed the last two chapters of Romans due to his anti-Jewish sentiments, as he would have disliked the Old Testament quotations in 15:3, 9-12, and 21, and the acclamation of the Jewish Scriptures as being valuable for Christians in 15:4. It is well known that Marcion opposed the Old Testament and resented the Jewish origins of Christianity.¹⁸

The main arguments with regard to Romans originally existing as a 15-chapter letter are also not definitive and the evidence to the contrary is much stronger. Importantly, there is no manuscript or textual evidence to suggest that Romans 15 and 16 ever circulated apart from each other.¹⁹ In the only surviving manuscripts in which chapter

¹⁶ Scott J. Hafemann, trans., Peter Stulmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 245.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 8.

¹⁸ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 26. (See also, Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary*, 4.)

¹⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 8.

16 is omitted, chapter 15 is also omitted.²⁰ This makes it probable that the two chapters were written by Paul, in all likelihood at the same time, and were intended for the Roman congregation; further evidence for this will be discussed.

Given that Papyrus 46 is the oldest manuscript for Paul's letters (c.200 C.E.), it is used as one of the strongest arguments that chapter 16 was an addition to the letter, given that it places the doxology at the end of chapter 15 and then contains 16:1-23 as an appendix. However, some manuscripts and versions, such as G, omit the doxology altogether, and some place it at the end of chapter 14, such as the Vulgate; other manuscripts, such as Codex Alexandrinus contains the doxology both at the end of chapter 14 and at the end of chapter 16. However, the majority of manuscripts (including P⁶¹, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus), contain the doxology at the end of chapter 16. Therefore, if a conclusion is to be drawn with regard to the original form of Romans purely on the basis of the manuscript evidence, it is clear that it should likely be placed at the end of chapter 16.²¹ The varying placement of the doxology suggests that, due to the editing of the text by Marcion and perhaps others, scribes were unsure as to the proper placement of the doxology. As a result, some played it safe and placed it after chapter 14 or 15 and also at the end of 16, other scribes chose to put it in one place but not the other.²²

1.3. Concluding Remarks

The important conclusion to be drawn is that Romans as a whole is likely to be authentic. The style and substance of Romans 15 and 16 are similar to the rest of the epistle, suggesting that Paul was fully involved in its composition. Despite some manuscript evidence to the contrary, it is clear that Romans 16 was in all likelihood attached by Paul to the letter to Rome in its original form. The manuscript evidence is not strong enough to support the opposite view as the inconsistent manuscript structures and the varying placements of the doxology were in all likelihood later changes to the text. The current version of Romans, with the inclusion of chapter 16, is therefore regarded as the original form of the letter and, as a result, can provide

²⁰ Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 21.

²¹ Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 24.

²² Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary*, 4. (See also, Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 26).

valuable evidence about Paul's understanding of the status and role of women within the early Christian communities.

Chapter 2: Deacons, Apostles, Missionaries: The Women of Romans 16:1-7

This chapter will present a discussion of what can be deduced about the role of the first four women mentioned in Romans 16. This will include analysis of what some of the vocabulary used by Paul may express about the roles of these women in the Pauline congregations. It will also focus on the exegetical and text-critical issues emerging from the passage, such as the problems with some of the translations of the term *diakonos* and *prostatis* (verses 1-2), which are used to describe the role of Phoebe, and what the nature of Mary's hard work (*ekopiasen*) (verse 6) may have been. This will be done in order to determine which translations are most likely to express the intended meaning of the words in question.

2.1. Deacon Phoebe (verses 1-2)

One of Phoebe's roles that can be deduced from Romans 16 is that she delivered the letter from Corinth to Rome on behalf of Paul. Romans 16:1-2 is a personal commendation of Phoebe. Travelling Christian missionaries commonly carried personal letters of recommendation, often contained in the epistles that they were delivering, when travelling to unfamiliar places (e.g. Tychicus (Eph. 6:21-22) and Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10-11)). The purpose of such expressions of recommendation was so that the writer of the letter could introduce the person delivering it to their friends or acquaintances in the community to which they had travelled, in order to ensure that they would receive the necessary support and hospitality.²³

²³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Missionaries, Apostles, Coworkers: Romans 16 and the Reconstruction of Women's Early Church History', in *World and World*, 6 (1986), 420-433 (424). <http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/6-4_Romans/6-4_Fiorenza.pdf> [accessed 20 November 2018].

This would have been especially the case for those Christian travellers who, after their probable long journey,²⁴ would need a safe place to lodge.²⁵ Just as Paul expected hospitality in the form of lodging (see Philem. 22 and 1 Cor. 16.6-7), he would likely have also expected the same hospitality to be given to his co-workers.²⁶ This is why, in Phoebe's letter of recommendation, he asked the people of Rome to 'welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints' and to 'help her in whatever she may require from you' (Rom. 16.2.). As Phoebe is also thought to be a leader of a Christian community in Corinth, an issue which will be returned to in the discussion of the term *diakonos*, her travel to Rome suggests that she, and perhaps other early Christian women leaders, formally represented their Christian communities and that their travels to other communities provided the means for contact between the various congregations.²⁷

The letter to the Romans is often considered to be the most detailed account of Paul's own theological beliefs.²⁸ Romans is different from the other Pauline epistles as in these he is often dealing with a current issue that the community to which he is writing is facing. Romans was written at a key time in Paul's apostolic career as he was about to undertake the risky trip to the city of Jerusalem. In this letter, he essentially expresses the core substance of his belief, and engages with issues which he perceived to be threatening to the Church,²⁹ such as warning his followers to 'keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned' (16:17). This was highly important, as Paul was well-aware of the harm caused by wrong ideas and false teachings of Christianity (see Col. 2:2-4; Gal. 2:4). Paul, therefore, sent this letter, containing a substantial outline of his theological

²⁴ Phoebe's journey from Corinth to Rome may have potentially been just under 900 miles and, in good conditions, is estimated to have taken around twelve days. This would be the case had she taken the fastest route, but there is no evidence to prove that this is the route that she travelled.

(Walter Scheidel and Elijah Meeks, 'Orbis: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World' (2012) <<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>> [accessed 10 January 2019]).

²⁵ Michael B. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First-Century Christian Generation, in *The Gospel for All Christians*, ed. by Richard Bauckham (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 49-70 (55).

²⁶ Michael B. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet', 56.

²⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Missionaries', 424.

²⁸ David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), vii.

²⁹ Leander E. Keck, 'What Makes Romans Tick?', in *Pauline Theology*, eds. by David M. Hay and Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 3-29. (3).

views, to the church in the most powerful city in order to protect the key structure of Christian belief. This only serves to highlight Phoebe's importance as the idea that Paul, who is arguably the most important figure in first-century Christianity, after Jesus, trusted Phoebe to deliver such an important letter on his behalf suggests that she was a significant figure in her early Christian community and was a notable associate of Paul.

Furthermore, in Romans 16:1 Phoebe's role is described as being a '*diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae'.³⁰ There has been much debate about what this term actually means and what it reveals about her role in the early Christian movement. In some translations of the New Testament (e.g. KJV) the term is translated to simply mean "servant." This could suggest that Phoebe did no more than perform tasks such as preparing a meal, (cf. Luke 10:40) and serving a meal (cf. Luke 22:27).³¹ However, if Paul was describing Phoebe in terms of her domestic service to the early Christian movement, he would more than likely have expressed this by use of the term *diakoneō* (to serve) (cf. Rom. 15:25), or *diakonia* (service) (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15).³² Furthermore, as Douglas J. Moo states, 'the addition of the phrase "of the church" makes it more likely that *diakonos* here is an official title designating Phoebe as a "deacon"' (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-12). There are other instances in Romans 16 of women who were also church leaders, such as Prisca (Rom. 16:3-5), who will be discussed next, and Julia and Neurus's sister (16:15), who will be discussed in the third chapter of this study. However, they are in charge of running their individual house churches and are not given the title of 'deacon'. This suggests that Phoebe's role may have been performed on a wider scale in her Christian community in Corinth.

It is generally accepted that the term 'deacon', as used by Paul, did not denote an official church office as it later became understood since Paul's letters were written

³⁰ Jouette M. Bassler, 'Phoebe', in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of the Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 134-135 (135).

³¹ Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, 'The Bible and the Ministry of Women – Part 3 "Women Ministers in the New Testament?', in *Must We Be Silent?* <<http://www.drpipim.org/divorce--remarriage-contemporaryissues-49/48-2-the-bible-and-the-ministry-of-womenpart-3.pdf>> [accessed 21 November 2018].

³² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (United States of America: World Incorporated, 1988), 887.

³³ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 209.

prior to the organisation of official church offices. Paul's wording of the title 'deacon of the church' when introducing Phoebe, however, suggests that it may have been a recognised office in early Christian churches.³⁴ It is possible that recognised offices were formed as people who regularly ministered or served the Church in a certain way were recognised for their work and were given a formal title.³⁵ Although there is no solid evidence to enable one to conclude that this is how offices in the early church were established, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that this is how they may have developed. Phoebe may have gained her role as a deacon in this way. Her work as a deacon may have involved ministry, providing relief for the poor, visiting the sick, and perhaps providing finances to the church.³⁶ However, this is an assumption based on the tasks of the later institution of the diaconate.

As *diakonos* Phoebe likely had some level of importance in her church community. However, some commentators and translators have been reluctant to accept this and have sought to conceal it. The term *diakonos* when referring to Phoebe has been translated as 'deaconess' (RSV and PHILLIPS), 'servant' (KJV and WYC), and 'minister' (Tyndale Bible) rather than 'deacon'. It is important to note in this respect that when writing the first English translation of the New Testament, William Tyndale translated the term *diakonos* to mean 'deacon' in 1 Timothy 3:8, but where the same Greek word was used to describe Phoebe he translated it as 'a minister of the congregation'.³⁷ This clearly amounts to an attempt to conceal Phoebe's role and imply that her role was less important than that of male early Christian deacons.

The Greek term *diakonos*, when used to describe Phoebe and also elsewhere in the Pauline texts is a masculine (rather than a feminine) noun. In view of this, perhaps the most significant conclusion that can be drawn from Romans 16 is that no distinction was made between the roles of male and female deacons. Phoebe's role as a deacon was equal, in all likelihood, to that of male deacons in early Christian churches (as

³⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 187.

³⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to The Romans*, 914.

³⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 914.

³⁷ John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.6.

described in 1 Tim. 3:8-13).³⁸ Phoebe is also described in Romans 16:2 as being a *prostatis*.³⁹ Again, there are disputes over the interpretation and proper translation of this term. Translations range from “helper” (ASV and Darby Bible) or “assistant” (DRA and PHILLIPS) to “patron” (ESV), “benefactor” (NIV and NRSV), or “leader” (YLT and CEV). Ben Witherington III argues that *prostatis* ‘probably means something like helper or protector. It connotes the personal care or hospitality that Phoebe had provided for Paul and others’.⁴⁰ He goes on to say that ‘the sense of protectress would not be too strong if Paul implies that he has received assistance from a woman when he was in a dangerous situation, perhaps when he needed seclusion in a private home’.⁴¹

However, as with the mistranslations of the term *diakonos*, this perspective boils down to the fact that many exegetes (particularly male) are unable to fathom the idea that women could have held important positions in early Christianity, or that Paul and other church members and missionaries would need to be supported by a woman, given that Paul describes Phoebe as a *prostatis* ‘of many and of myself’ (16:2). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that androcentric perspectives in the study of early Christian history have meant that exegetes have historically thought that ‘the leadership of the early church was in the hands of men, [they] assume that the women mentioned in the Pauline letters were helpers and assistants of the male apostles and missionaries, especially of Paul’.⁴² This means that exegetes struggle to ‘imagine or conceptualise that women such as Phoebe could have had leadership equal to and sometimes even superior to men in early Christian beginnings’.⁴³ This issue will also be addressed during the analysis of Junia (16:7) as many exegetes mistranslated her name in the masculine form for these same reasons.

There has been much effort in recent years in trying to uncover the actual roles of women in early Christianity. In this case, it has been suggested that Phoebe was not simply a helper or assistant of Paul and of her church community at Cenchreae but

³⁸ Susanne Heine, *Women and Early Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 88.

³⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Women in Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 113.

⁴⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Women in Earliest Churches*, 113-114.

⁴¹ Witherington III, *Women in Earliest Churches*, 113-114.

⁴² Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Missionaries’, 425-426.

⁴³ Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Missionaries’, 425-426.

that she was, in fact, a benefactor (this term is used in the NRSV) or leader. An examination of the use of the verb from which *prostatis* is drawn (*proistēmi*) in the New Testament context indicates that it can include church leadership. For example, in Romans 12:8 it is translated as ‘lead’. If Paul was simply describing Phoebe as a ‘helper’ he would probably have used other Greek words, such as *boēthos* (‘helper’) or *hupēretēs* (‘one who functions as a helper’).⁴⁴ It has also been speculated that Phoebe was probably a woman of high social standing and had a great deal of wealth. As such, her role as a leader and benefactor would possibly have involved providing funds for her church community (and perhaps the wider Church) and coming to the financial aid of others.⁴⁵ If this was the case, as Cenchreae was a busy sea-port, her role would have been vitally important in helping travelling Christians with financial matters.⁴⁶ As a result, she was aiding with the spread of the Christian message.

This is also perhaps why Paul refers to her as a *prostatis* ‘of myself’ in Romans 16:2. Paul was personally indebted to her in some way, maybe because she provided him with financial support to fulfil his mission; however, this is not known for sure. Phoebe’s role as *prostatis* highlights her importance in her Christian community as providing funds was an essential task to ensure the survival and thriving of early Christian communities. Prisca and Aquila’s involvement in forming and running house churches was also essential for this reason. This demonstrates that the roles that women performed were of paramount importance in early Christianity, specifically for the endurance of Christianity. Prisca’s role will be discussed in the following section of this study as she is greeted next in Romans 16.

2.2. Prisca: A Co-worker in Christ (verses 3-5)

On the whole, Prisca, who is greeted along with her husband Aquila, is spoken of six times in the New Testament writings (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19; Acts 18:2-3; 18:18; 18:26). The impression learned from both Romans and Acts is that Prisca and Aquila, like Phoebe who was trusted to deliver Paul’s letter, and Rufus’s mother (16:2) who will be discussed in the third chapter of this study, were reliable

⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. McCabe, ‘A Reexamination of Phoebe as “Diakonos” and “Prostatis”’: Exposing the Inaccuracies of English Translations’, in *Society of Biblical Literature*, <<https://www.sblsite.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=830>> [accessed 11 January 2019].

⁴⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Missionaries’, 426.

⁴⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 916.

workers and close allies of Paul. This suggests that women played an important role in helping Paul to further his mission. This is verified in Romans 16:3 when he states that they ‘work with me in Christ Jesus’ and that ‘to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles’ (16:4). This statement in Rom. 16:4 implies that, not only is Paul personally thankful to them for their work, but also that their work to further the cause of Christianity was successful and widespread.

According to Acts 18:2 Prisca and Aquila came to Corinth from Rome following the expulsion of the Jews from the Roman capital by Emperor Claudius in 49 C.E.. While there, they met Paul and began working together as they all shared the same trade as tentmakers.⁴⁷ Paul’s affection for them would have been solidified due to the fact that they “risked their necks for [his] life” (Rom. 16:4). This possibly occurred during the Ephesian riot (see Acts 19:23-41). Although it cannot be known for sure, Prisca and Aquila may have used their wealth to gain protection for Paul.⁴⁸

The role of Prisca and Aquila in early Christianity was likely that of a missionary couple. The most prominent evidence for them preaching as a missionary couple comes from Acts 18:24-26 when they hear Apollos preaching about Jesus in a synagogue in Ephesus. However, as Apollos ‘knew only the baptism of John’ (18:25), Prisca and Aquila ‘took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately’ (18:26). Paul’s use of the term *synergoi* (fellow workers) also implies that Prisca and Aquila worked closely with him,⁴⁹ and had some level of authority and importance to the early Christian mission. The term is also used by Paul to describe other prominent figures such as Timothy (Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2), and Apollos (1 Cor. 3:9).⁵⁰ Furthermore, Paul’s affirmation in Romans 16:4, ‘to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles’ only serves to highlight how widespread and important Prisca’s missionary work and influence was on the early Christian movement more generally.

⁴⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 891.

⁴⁸ Jouette M. Bassler, ‘Priscilla’, in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of the Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 136-137 (137).

⁴⁹ As well as working with him in Corinth, they travelled with him from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Castelli, ‘Romans’, in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994), 272-300 (279).

In Romans 16:5, Paul sends greetings to ‘the church in their house.’ The same greeting is given to them in Corinthians 16:19. Paul also sends greetings to house churches in his other writings (e.g. Col. 4:15). In first-century Christianity private homes were used as congregational meeting places for Christians to gather together. According to the ‘household model’, which is the predominant idea of early church formation, the nucleus of the congregation of the house church was made up of the household group (which included slaves, freedmen, and other dependents, as well as the immediate family members). This structure provided the primary leadership arrangement of the churches in the form of the heads of the household, Prisca and Aquila would, therefore, likely have held leadership positions in their house churches, and also enabled women in the household to actively participate in ecclesiastical life.⁵¹

In early Christianity, meetings were thought to have involved partaking of the Lord’s Supper and a shared meal.⁵² As house churches functioned practically as an extended household, a domain which is commonly associated with women, it has been thought that this facilitated the involvement of women in their churches.⁵³ Prisca’s designation as the leader of a house church is one of three instances in Romans 16 where women are commended for this task (the others being Julia and Neurus’s sister in verse 15, who will be discussed in the third chapter of this study). The women in Romans 16 who are commended for their involvement in the running of house churches may have been important due to their involvement in the preparation of the meal. However, as will be discussed, there is no suggestion that the role of either of these women was limited to this and their roles were likely more substantial.

Prisca and Aquila’s house church congregation may have been different from the typical ‘household model’. As Edward Adams has said: ‘There is no indication in the Pauline letters or book of Acts that Prisca and Aquila had children or slaves; they appear simply as a missionary couple’.⁵⁴ He goes on to say that as there is no mention of the ‘household of Prisca and Aquila’, and, especially since such remarks could have been used (e.g. in 2 Tim. 4:19, where Prisca and Aquila are greeted alone in the same

⁵¹ Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), p.2.

⁵² Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 66.

⁵³ Margaret Y. MacDonald, ‘Reading Real Women’, 204.

⁵⁴ Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, p.19.

sentence in which ‘the household of Onesiphorus’ is greeted), it is likely that their house churches were composed of converts made by them as a missionary couple;⁵⁵ however, while it is highly possible that this is the case it cannot be known for sure.

Prisca and Aquila’s role in opening and running house churches was vital as it provided the means for early Christians to meet together. That they also founded and ran a house church in other communities that they moved to (see 1 Cor. 19:19) suggests that they were in all likelihood quite prosperous economically and had ample funds to be able to do this. Like Phoebe, who is also thought to have been a wealthy woman who may have provided funds for Christian missionaries and Christian communities, the role of Prisca as leader of a house church and her financial contribution to this was essential to early Christianity as it helped to enable the survival of Christianity; a religion which was in its infancy and constantly open to threats and persecution (see Gal. 4:29).

Perhaps the most noteworthy detail in the references to Prisca and Aquila in the New Testament is that in four of the six instances Prisca is mentioned first before her husband Aquila (Acts 18:18, 18:26, Rom. 16:3, 2 Tim. 4:19). Name order is generally considered to be an indication of hierarchy, as the more important person’s name would routinely be placed first.⁵⁶ The most generally accepted reason for this different sequence is that Prisca was perhaps of nobler birth and higher social status than Aquila, or because she may have had greater prominence and more active involvement in the early Christian mission, or in the leadership of the house church;⁵⁷ which may also indicate that she had a greater involvement than simply preparing the meal for the church service. Another woman who is also thought to have had an active involvement in the early Christian mission is Mary who is greeted after Prisca in Romans 16:6. Her contribution to early Christianity will be analysed next in this study.

⁵⁵ Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, p.19.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth A. Castelli, ‘Romans’, 279.

⁵⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Missionaries’, 428.

2.3. Hardworking Mary (verse 6)

Compared to Phoebe and Prisca, the amount of information provided by Paul on the role of Mary is not as substantial. Romans 16:6, the only verse to mention Mary, merely states that she has ‘worked very hard among you’. This is one of four instances in which women are commended in Romans 16 for their hard work; the other occasions being in reference to Tryphaena and Tryphosa and Persis (16:12). This suggests that women performed difficult tasks on behalf of the church and did so with great devotion. The nature of the work that Mary, and the women listed in verse 12, carried out is not explained. However, the sheer fact that she is mentioned in the chapter implies that she was of significance to Paul and the early Church.⁵⁸ It should be emphasised that Romans 16 is a rather personal chapter, one in which Paul sends greetings and gratitude to the people whom he considered to be close associates; that is, people who have helped him with his work and served the early Christian Church in some significant manner.

While the essence of Mary’s hard work cannot be inferred, Paul uses the same verbal form (*ekopiasen*) to describe his own missionary work (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:10) and to describe other important tasks such as teaching and preaching, or leading a local congregation (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:16; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:12).⁵⁹ Paul may, therefore, be characterising Mary’s role and function to be of equal significance. Based on the use of the word elsewhere it can be suggested that she may have been involved in preaching for her local congregation in Rome, or she may have carried out missionary work on behalf of the church. However, there is no categorical evidence in support or against this proposal.

2.4. Apostle Junia (verse 7)

The next person greeted by Paul in Romans 16 is Junia. Like Phoebe, Prisca, and Mary she is also thought to have had a prominent role in early Christianity. However, as will be discussed, her role was perhaps more widespread and superior. Junia is mentioned in Romans 16 along with Andronicus, who is likely to have been her husband. They are described as being ‘prominent among the apostles’ (16:7). As a

⁵⁸ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 108.

⁵⁹ Leander E. Keck, *Romans* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2005), 372.

result of this appointment, Paul has now given two instances of women in named leadership positions who performed important work in early Christianity. Whilst Phoebe's role as *diakonos* shows that some women were held in high esteem in their local churches and occupied some level of importance in their church community, Junia's designation as an apostle provides New Testament evidence that women may have been designated in the highest regard in early Christianity more generally. Junia's appointment as an apostle may have meant that she was part of an elect group who performed work that was highly important to the early Church; this issue will be elaborated upon further when discussing the possible criterion for Junia's appointment as an apostle and what her role may have involved.

As a result of Junia's designation as an apostle (*apostolos*), in the past many scribes have mistranslated or purposely adjusted certain words and statements in Romans 16:7; similar treatment was given to Phoebe as was discussed previously. One of the ways in which this has been done was the adjusting of the name *Iounia*, making it the masculine form Junias. Giles of Rome (1245-1316), was the first person who took the name to be masculine. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, he referred to Andronicus and Junia as 'those honourable men [*viri*]'.⁶⁰ No other commentator of the text had done this before him.

The designation of Junia in the male form (Junias) took hold during the Reformation period onwards when prominent theologians of the period such as Faber Stapulensis (1455-1536) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) referred to the name in the masculine form.⁶¹ Yet, early Church writers, such as John Chrysostom (ca.344-407), John Damascene (ca.675-749), and Bruno the Carthusian (ca.1030-1101) explicitly interpreted the name in the female form (Junia).⁶² For example, in his *Homilies on Romans*, Chrysostom says of Junia: 'how great is the devotion [...] of this woman, that

⁶⁰ Bernadette Brooten, 'Junia', in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. by Carol Meyers, Toni Crave, and Ross S. Kraemer (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 107.

⁶¹ Bernadette Brooten, 'Junia...Outstanding Among the Apostles', in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on Vatican Declaration*, ed. by Leonard Swindler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 141-144 (141-142).

⁶² Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p.32.

she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!’⁶³ One of the only early Church writers to refer to Junia in the masculine form (Junias) was Epiphanius. However, not much store should be placed on this judgement as he also refers to Prisca as being a man.⁶⁴

Similarly to the reasons for the mistranslations of Phoebe’s role as *diakonos* and *prostatis*, the main reason for the later interpreters translating the name in the masculine form was because they could not fathom the idea that a woman could have held such an important position.⁶⁵ The attempted erasing of the importance of the roles that the women of Romans 16 held in their early Christian communities was a common theme throughout the history of interpretation and translation of the text. It is important to note that the name Junias is unattested; it does not appear in any Latin or Greek inscriptions, nor does it appear in any ancient literature. This means that there is no evidence that the name Junias ever existed. By contrast, the name Junia is a common name in both Latin and Greek inscriptions and literature.⁶⁶ This makes it highly likely that the use of the feminine name Junia is correct and the translation of the name in the masculine form was nothing more than another attempt to oppose and erase the importance of the role of women in early Christianity.

Another way in which Church writers and translators have attempted to devalue the role of Junia was through the mistranslation of the phrase ‘prominent among the apostles’ (16:7). It has been translated in forms such as: ‘they are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles’ (CSB); ‘who are held in high esteem in the estimation of the apostles’ (AMP); ‘they are well known to the apostles’ (NET Bible); and ‘they are respected by the apostles’ (TLB). This issue has similar consequences to the false translation of *diakonos* as ‘deaconess’ in Phoebe’s case and devalues Junia’s position. Phrases such as these have been used because they were seen as more readily

⁶³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0345-0407,_Iohannes_Chrysostomus,_Homilies_on_The_Epistle_To_The_Romans,_EN.pdf> [accessed 11 January 2019].

⁶⁴ Eldon J. Epp, *Junia*, 34.

⁶⁵ Bernadette J. Brooten, ‘Junia’, in *Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 107.

⁶⁶ Bernadette Brooten, ‘Junia...Outstanding Among the Apostles’, 142-143.

acceptable when referring to the position of a woman.⁶⁷ Douglas J. Moo explains why these translations are likely not correct. He says that ‘with a plural object, *en* often means “among”; and if Paul had wanted to say that Andronicus and Junia were esteemed “by” the apostles, we would have expected him to use a simple dative or [*hypo*] with the genitive’.⁶⁸

Another major debate in the designation of Junia as an ‘apostle’ focuses on what ‘apostle’ really meant. Firstly, it is important to note that, although the popular understanding of the term apostle is attributed exclusively to the Twelve Disciples (this is based on the use of the term in the Gospels, specifically Luke’s gospel), the term ‘apostle’ has a broader application in Pauline Christianity.⁶⁹ It is fairly reasonable, based on certain passages from the New Testament, to accept that there was a broader body of apostles than just the Twelve Apostles. For example in 1 Corinthians 15:5-9, it is stated that Jesus appeared to ‘the twelve’ (15:5) who are listed as a separate group from ‘all the apostles’ (15:7). Furthermore, there are other instances of people being referred to as ‘apostles’ (e.g. Apollos (1 Cor. 4:9); and Barnabas (Acts 14:14)). Andronicus and Junia, along with these other people, may have belonged to this wider band.⁷⁰ Importantly, Junia’s role as an apostle was likely equal to that of the male apostles mentioned; there is nothing to suggest otherwise.

Throughout the Pauline letters, there are also clues as to the criterion for which one needs to fulfil in order to be granted the title of ‘Apostle’. This criterion included being an eyewitness to the risen Lord (see 1 Cor. 9:1 and 1 Cor. 15:5-9). Paul also states that being an apostle involved receiving a commission from the risen Christ to proclaim the gospel (see Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; and Gal. 1:1). There is no evidence from Romans 16:7 to conclude that Andronicus and Junia fulfilled this criterion. However, as will be discussed further, it is feasible to assume that they did.

⁶⁷ Epp, *Junia*, 72.

⁶⁸ Douglas J. Moo, cited in Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, ‘Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Romans 16.7’, in *New Testament Studies*, 47 (2001), 76-91 (80). < https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/docview/197139379?accountid=130472&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Apmo > [accessed 18 January 2019].

⁶⁹ MacDonald, ‘Reading Real Women Through the Undisputed Letters of Paul’, in *Women and Christian Origins*, eds. by Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 221-234 (209).

⁷⁰ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 534.

Being an apostle also, according to Paul, involved the acceptance of suffering connected with such missionary work and activity (see 2 Cor. 11:16-33). Paul also says that apostleship is validated by the results of such hard work, namely, 'signs and wonders and mighty works' (2 Cor. 12:11-12). There are hints in Romans 16:7 to suggest that Andronicus and Junia may have fulfilled this criterion. For example, through Paul stating that Andronicus and Junia were 'in prison with me' (16:7), the suggestion is made that they too may have suffered for their apostleship. This, of course, however, relies on the idea that they were imprisoned because of the missionary work that they carried out as apostles, and this is not known for sure. However, the fact that Paul calls them his 'fellow prisoners' could suggest that their imprisonment, like Paul's, was on account of their work for the church.⁷¹

Moreover, their description as being 'prominent among the apostles' (16:7), suggests that the results of their work had yielded many results,⁷² and they were being recognised for their 'mighty works'. However, none of this is known for sure as the nature or extent of their work is not revealed. The reasons for their designation as 'apostles', and the function of their work, can only be assumed through other descriptions in the New Testament. However, the likelihood that the criterion expressed in other Pauline letters also applied to Junia is further understood in the view that Paul, in his letters, felt the need to vigorously defend his apostleship (see especially 2 Cor. 12:11-12) and that he candidly talked about his apostleship (see Rom. 1:1). Therefore, as Eldon Jay Epp has said: this makes it 'highly unlikely that he would imply the term apostle loosely when applying it to others',⁷³ and if Paul had not recognised the traits in which he assigned to apostles in others 'he would not designate to call them apostles'.⁷⁴ Therefore, based on this, the presumption that Andronicus and Junia did meet these criteria is given more weight.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

The main discovery which can be drawn from the analysis of the information provided in Romans 16 about the first four women mentioned is that women held important

⁷¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 923.

⁷² Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 188.

⁷³ Epp, *Junia*, 70.

⁷⁴ Epp, *Junia*, 70.

positions in early Christianity; at least in some communities. Both Phoebe and Prisca undertook important roles in their local communities; Phoebe did so through her role as *diakonos* and Prisca did so through her running of a house church. Moreover, Junia's designation as an apostle implies that women also held important roles in early Christianity more generally. The importance of Mary's role is harder to determine as very little information is provided about her in Romans 16:6. However, based on clues from other passages, it is possible to presume that her role may have involved missionary work or teaching her local congregation; but this is not known for sure. However, the sheer fact that she is acknowledged and greeted by Paul suggests that her work stood out and may have obtained some merit.

Furthermore, an important finding from the analysis of Romans 16:1-7 is that no distinction is made between the roles assigned to women where the same roles are assigned to men. Phoebe is referred to as a *diakonos*, which is the same masculine noun used in other Pauline letters; Junia's appointment as an apostle is equal to others, such as Timothy and Barnabus; there is also no distinction made between the importance of Mary's hard work and that of Paul and others; and Prisca's mention before her husband implies that she had a greater prominence and importance in her early Christian community than he did. A key issue drawn from historical analyses of Romans 16 is attempted dismissal of the importance of the roles of these women. Exegetes, in the past, have falsely translated certain terms associated with them and diminished their importance in early Christianity. Demonstrating the actual roles of these women is important so that they are no longer marginalised.

Chapter 3: The Hardworking Women of Romans 16:12-15:

No women are greeted by Paul in verses 8-11 of Romans 16; all of the figures greeted here are men. This chapter will analyse what Paul says about the roles of the six women mentioned in the second half of his greetings (specifically, Rom. 16: 12-15). It is important to note that the information provided by Paul about these women is not as

substantial or detailed as the information provided about the women discussed in the second chapter of this study. Paul tends to describe these women with nothing more than a single adjective before moving on to greet the next person. Moreover, in the case of Julia and Neurus's sister (16:15) Paul simply lists their names. Douglas J. Moo explains that this is perhaps because at the beginning of Romans 16 (up to verse 7) he may be greeting people that he knows well, whereas in verses 8-15 he is greeting people 'that he may know only casually or perhaps even only by reputation'.⁷⁵ This is a plausible assessment of the textual evidence.

3.1. Tryphaena and Tryphosa: Missionary Sisters (verse 12)

As Tryphaena and Tryphosa are greeted together and the common origin of their names, with both names coming from the root meaning 'live delicately' and literally meaning 'Delicate' and 'Dainty', the suggestion is that they were sisters (or even twin sisters). While this is not known for sure, it is quite possible given that it was common to assign names that derived from the same root or were similar in sound to members of the same family.⁷⁶ The only information provided about Tryphaena and Tryphosa is that they were 'workers in the Lord' (16:12). The Greek word in question (*kopiōsas*) is linked to the Greek *ekopiasen* (both words derive from the root *kopos* meaning 'labour'). This suggests that the nature of their work is possibly similar to Mary's hard work (Rom. 16:6), as discussed previously. Again, based on use of the word elsewhere in the Pauline letters, the work being referred to may be missionary work (as used in 1 Cor. 15:10), or teaching and preaching, or leading a local congregation (as used in 1 Cor. 16:16; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:12); but, again, there is no evidence to support or oppose this proposal.

Mary Rose D'Angelo has suggested that as these two women are spoken of together and greeted by a single verb they may have worked closely together and, based on the context of Romans 16, Tryphaena and Tryphosa should be seen as missionary

⁷⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 918.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 897.

partners.⁷⁷ This resembles the way that Paul and Timothy are acknowledged.⁷⁸ If it is the case that Tryphaena and Tryphosa were a missionary partnership, this is highly significant. Here, we are given the only instance in Romans 16 of a female-female partnership. All the other couples mentioned in Romans 16 are male-female partnerships – Prisca and Aquila (16:3); Andronicus and Junia (16:4); Rufus and his mother (16:13); Philologus and Julia (16:15); and Neurus and his sister (16:15).⁷⁹ This suggests that women worked together to further the cause of the church without the need for the help of a male.

Whilst one cannot come to a solid conclusion about the nature of Tryphaena and Tryphosa's work, the fact that they are greeted by Paul suggests that he is appreciative of their work and the outcome of their work was significant and noticeable to him.⁸⁰ If Moo is correct in his assumption that the people greeted after verse 8 are people whom Paul knows only by reputation, this would only serve to highlight the possible widespread effect of their work and the extent of their influence on some early Christians. This may also be the case for Persis who is greeted in the same verse and is also praised for the same work as Tryphaena and Tryphosa. The reference to her will be analysed next in this study.

3.2. Hardworking Persis (verse 12)

Persis is also mentioned in Romans 16:12, and, similarly to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Mary (16:6), she is described as having 'worked hard in the Lord' (16:12). As the same Greek term, *ekopiasen*, is used here, one can also assume that she also may have carried out missionary work, or preached or led her local congregation. Interestingly, Persis (and also Mary) is described with the aorist indicative *ekopiasen* (has worked), but Tryphaena and Tryphosa are described with the present participle *kopiōsas*

⁷⁷ Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Women Partners in the New Testament', in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 6 (1990), 65-86 (73) <<https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=8d2f4923-d3bf-46f0-9b24-9d6271e46c5f%40sdc-v-sessmgr04>> [accessed 12 February 2019]. (See also, Mary Rose D'Angelo, 'Tryphaena', in *Women in Scripture A Dictionary of the Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 166.

⁷⁸ Mary Rose D'Angelo, cited in, Susan E. Smith, *Women in Mission: From the New Testament to Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 21.

⁷⁹ MacDonald, 'Reading Real Women', 207.

⁸⁰ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 536.

(workers). This has led to the suggestion that, at the time Paul was writing the letter, Tryphaena and Tryphosa may still have been carrying out their work, but Persis had perhaps completed her labours. It has been speculated that she may have been too old or sick to continue in her work.

It is highly significant that, on the whole, Paul commends four women in Romans 16 for having worked hard. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 Paul tells the community in Thessalonica to ‘respect those who labour among you’, showing that Paul held people who laboured for the sake of the Christian movement in high regard. Paul’s references to these women in Romans 16 shows that he wanted to acknowledge them and likely thought that they deserved respect. Moreover, whilst Tryphaena and Tryphosa’s recognition demonstrates that female-only missionary partnerships may have existed in some early Christian communities, the acknowledgements of both Mary and Persis in Romans 16 provides an indication that some women may have worked alone in early Christianity, without a partner; at least in some communities.

In Romans 16:12, Persis is also described as ‘the beloved’. Previously in the chapter, Paul had shown his affection for certain people by referring to them as ‘my beloved’ (see 16:5, 8, 9). This may be an indication that Persis was influential to many in her church community, and perhaps even to the early church more generally, and was held in high regard by all who knew her.⁸¹ This is similar to the reference to Prisca as being appreciated by ‘all the churches of the Gentiles’ (16:4), suggesting that women were greatly admired for their work by early Christians. Furthermore, the reference to Persis as ‘the beloved’ instead of ‘my beloved’ may indicate that Paul did not know her personally. Paul may know that Persis is ‘beloved’ because he has heard (perhaps from others who knew her) of her reputation; but, this is not definitively known. However, not all of the women greeted by Paul in Romans 16 are important due to their work for the Church. This is specifically the case for Rufus’s mother who will be discussed subsequently in this study.

⁸¹ Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary*, 394. (See also, Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 897., and Jouette M. Bassler, ‘Persis’, in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of the Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer 9 Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing 2000), 134.).

3.3. Rufus's Mother: A Support to Paul (verse 13)

The reference to Rufus's mother is the first of two instances in the greetings of Romans 16 where the person is not named; the other being Neurus's sister (16:15), who will be discussed in the next section of this study after the analysis of Rufus's mother is complete. Not much information is provided about Rufus's mother; Paul simply states that she was 'a mother to me also' (16:13). It is generally accepted that this does not mean that she is Paul's mother in the literal sense.⁸² Rather, it is thought that, on some occasion, Paul had received some form of (motherly) kindness or hospitality from her.⁸³ However, no further details are provided on the exact nature or occasion of the support she may have provided.

The greeting to Rufus's mother is, arguably, the most personal and affectionate of all the greetings listed in Romans 16. The greetings to other women in Romans 16 whom it is clear that Paul met and to whom he was close, specifically Phoebe, who was assigned by Paul to deliver the letter to Rome, and Prisca and Aquila, who worked with Paul, are remembered in terms of their active service in their Christian community (and early Christianity more generally) to further Paul's cause. Rufus's mother, on the other hand, is mentioned because she is personally important to Paul but is not necessarily important to furthering the cause of the wider Christian community. In any case, there is no evidence from Romans 16, or other areas of the New Testament, to suggest that she was.

The reference to Rufus's mother, nonetheless, is significant, as it displays the deep level of admiration and respect that Paul held towards the women who had helped him in his mission. Paul's reference to her as being like a mother to him suggests that they had a special relationship and he was incredibly fond of her.⁸⁴ Paul does not display the same level of personal affection to the other women greeted and instead the focus is on commending them for their work. In the final two verses of Romans 16 Paul

⁸² Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 353. (See also, Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio Rhetoric Commentary*, 394., and Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 536.).

⁸³ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 414.

⁸⁴ Jouette M. Bassler, 'Mother of Rufus', in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of the Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. by Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing 2000), 469.

returns to this pattern. An analysis of the roles of the women commended by Paul in the final greeting (16:15) will be presented in the subsequent final section of this study.

3.4. Julia and Neurus's Sister: Church Leaders (verse 15)

Julia and Neurus's sister are the final people greeted by Paul in Romans 16. They are greeted together in the same verse and are presented in a list along with three others: Philologus, Neurus himself, and Olympus (16:15). Again, Paul provides little information in this short verse about the roles of these women, but, based on the analysis of certain terms used in the verse and the use of historical information and theories, it is possible to determine what the role of these women may have been. The use of the phrase 'and all the saints who are with them' (16:15) provides an indication that Julia and Neurus's sister, along with the others named, may also have been involved in running a house church and the 'saints' being referred to here are the members of this church.⁸⁵

The pairing of 'Julia' (a feminine name) with 'Philologus' (a masculine name) indicates that they may have been husband and wife. If this is the case, it may be another example of a husband and wife team, like Prisca and Aquila, who are involved in the organisation of a house church. If one is to assume that Julia and Philologus were husband and wife, 'Neurus and his sister' may have been their children.⁸⁶ This is, however, no more than an interesting but speculative proposal. All of the names referenced in Romans 16:15 were originally used of slaves, which suggests that the members of this group were of low social standing.⁸⁷ Given that it is thought they were involved in running a house church, the common assumption is that they were, in all likelihood, freed slaves. At that time, a slave could expect to be granted freedom by their master following a certain number of years in their service (usually until they were 30 or 40 years old).⁸⁸

These people more than likely lived in a multi-story tenement house (*insula*), as, according to Bruce Frier, such buildings accommodated probably around ninety per

⁸⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), p.797.

⁸⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 926.

⁸⁷ Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 32.

⁸⁸ Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 52.

cent of the free population in Rome.⁸⁹ The church led by Julia and Neurus's sister, therefore, likely met in tenement housing. Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest church buildings in Rome, the *San Giovanni e Paolo al Celio* and *San Clemente*, appear to have been constructed over older *insula* apartments. It is quite possible that Christian communities may have met in a room within the original *insula* building.⁹⁰

This provides a significant proposition, as the other women greeted in Romans 16 who were important figures in the organisation of their churches (Phoebe and Prisca) were thought to be wealthy women. Julia and Neurus's sister's probable involvement in the running of a house church suggests that even women of a lower social standing could perform important roles in their early Christian community. Julia and Neurus's sister, along with the other three people greeted in Romans 16:15 were likely to have been named by Paul because they were important figures in their tenement church. It was normally the case that in a house church, there was a distinct hierarchical structure, with the owners of the building assuming the role of patron and having authority over the church; as was thought to be true in the case of Prisca. However, in the case of a tenement church, this would not have existed.

Instead, Julia and Neurus's sister, along with the three others mentioned in Romans 16:15, likely all provide some form of leadership and organisation over the church; there is no indication that any one of them had assumed the role as patron.⁹¹ An important assumption that can be drawn from this is that there was no gender-based hierarchical structure in the running of the house church. This may also suggest that, like Prisca, Julia and Neurus's sister may have had greater involvement in the running of the house church than simply preparing the meal. Given that they were greeted equally along with the men in the verse, Julia and Neurus's sister, in all possibility, were equally as important to the running of the house church as the men were.

⁸⁹ Bruce Frier, cited in, Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 54.

⁹⁰ Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 54.

⁹¹ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 65.

3.5. Concluding Remarks

The most important finding with regard the roles of the women listed in Romans 16:12-15 is that an example may have been provided, in the case of Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v.12), of women performing missionary work in partnership with one another, and that they did so without the support of men. Furthermore, the reference to Persis (v.12) may also provide evidence of a woman performing missionary work or preaching alone. Therefore, it can be presumed that, in at least some early Christian communities, women were entrusted with the important task of preaching the Gospel and were allowed to perform the same important tasks as men without requiring their help or guidance.

Paul, again, provides evidence of women being involved in the leadership of a house church, in the case of Julia and Neurus's sister (v.15). They were likely to have been involved in the collective leadership and organisation of the house church along with the others greeted with them. Importantly, there is no indication of hierarchy and it is likely that the women were regarded as being equally as important as the men. Paul provides the most personal of all his references in verse 13 by greeting Rufus's mother as 'a mother to me also'. Whilst this reference does not offer any indication that she was important to the early Christian movement, it does provide evidence of the admiration and high-regard that Paul had towards women who had supported him in his work.

Conclusion

All of the women listed in Romans 16 appear to have been involved in a wide range of activities in early Christianity.⁹² Their roles range from teaching and preaching (i.e. Mary, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, and Persis); to church planting and leadership of house churches (i.e. Prisca, and Julia and Neurus's sister); to assuming important roles in their church community, for example as a deacon (i.e. Phoebe); and being appointed to significant positions in the early Church more generally, for example as an Apostle (i.e. Junia). Their presence in Romans 16 shows that women were actively

⁹² Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 187.

involved in certain roles in the early Church and were important to the development of Christianity.⁹³ That Paul felt the need to address these women and commend them for their work suggests that they were noteworthy individuals in their church community. Importantly, there is never any distinction made between the significance of the roles applied to women where the same role is assigned to a man; their performance of these roles was of equal importance. As Margaret Y. MacDonald said, ‘the references to specific women in Paul’s letters indicate that women’s leadership in this early period was neither different from that of men nor of lesser value to the community than the contributions of men’.⁹⁴

Analysis of Romans 16 also suggests that Paul was supportive of the active participation of women in the church, given that he acknowledged their roles and praised them for their work. However, the contents of Romans 16 has tended to be ignored by the Christian Church and by scholars; both in the debate about Paul’s perception of women and in debate about women in early Christianity. Romans 16 has been overlooked and, as a result, the women in it have become alienated and historically invisible.⁹⁵ Even when these women have been acknowledged the text has been misinterpreted or deliberately falsely translated in order to bury the importance of the women and, in the case of Junia, to conceal her existence altogether.⁹⁶ Proper analysis of Romans 16 is important as it shows that women were not always marginalised by the Church and were important in its early development; at least in some communities.

⁹³ Elizabeth A. Catelli, ‘Romans’, 276.

⁹⁴ MacDonald, ‘Reading Real Women’, 210.

⁹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Missionaries’, 422.

⁹⁶ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament*, 58.

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